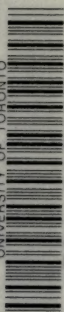


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# The Last Blackbird



RALPH HODGSON

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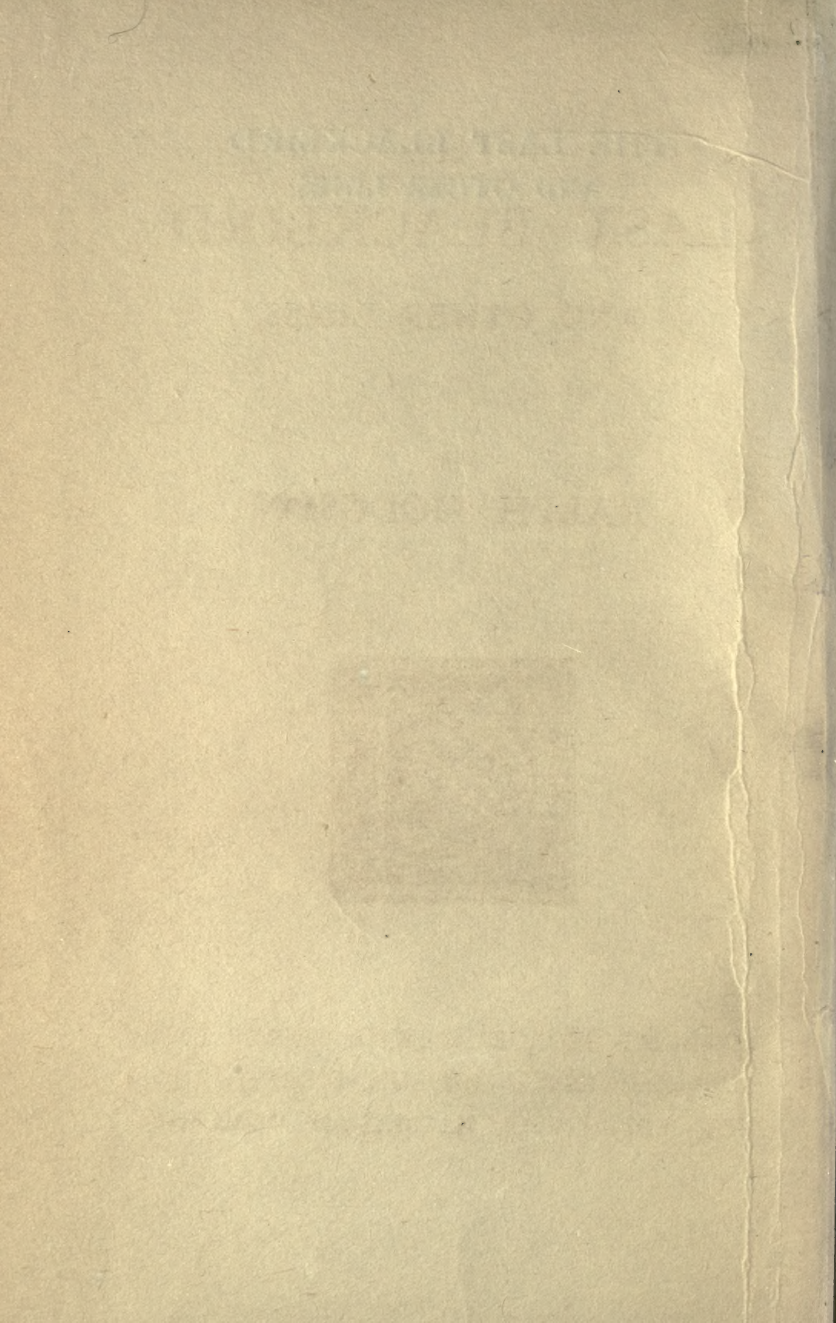








THE LAST BLACKBIRD  
AND OTHER LINES





THE  
LAST BLACKBIRD  
AND OTHER LINES

BY  
RALPH HODGSON



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## LINES

NO pitted toad behind a stone  
But hoards some secret grace ;  
The meanest slug with midnight gone  
Has left a silver trace.

No dullest eyes to beauty blind,  
Uplifted to the beast,  
But prove some kin with angel kind,  
Though lowliest and least.

## THE TREASURE-BOX

I WOND'RING see the rainbow stain  
The sea ; I dumbly guess  
Why on a wintry window-pane  
Late Eden's effloresce ;

If bubbles at the river's brim  
Have souls for destiny ;  
Why twilight freights the blackbird's hymn  
With deeper mystery ;

If chiff-chaffs voyaging in March  
Are charted by the light  
Of angels' eyes whose pinions arch  
A hemisphere with night ;

What ocean maids through ocean shells  
Sing ocean roundelay ;  
What tears are those in evening bells  
A harvest field away ;

What gladness fills the yellow wren  
When June is in the thorn ;  
What triumph knows the great sun when  
A winter rose is born.

The gold-winged exquisites that shine  
Upon the yew in May  
But sadness give this heart of mine  
That cannot know their day.

I wond'ring watch the new gnats weave  
Mad mazes in the sky,  
And guess their joys as they achieve  
A moment's empery.

I guess the tales on buntings' eggs—  
Who runs may never read—  
Drain speculation to the dregs  
About a thistle seed.

I have a crystal treasure-box,  
Its stores are held from me ;  
I cannot force its thousand locks,  
And have no master-key.



## ST. ATHELSTAN

O NOT the rain that wets his face,  
And not the winds that beat and chill,  
Not these bid shepherd mend his pace  
To-night across the hill.

It is no sheep hath shepherd lost,  
Yet hoarse he cries, and crying will  
He cross again as he has crost  
And crost again the hill.

A strong man's eyes with grief a-swim  
Are like to make an angel's dim :  
Whose prayers him choke or ever twice  
He prays will angels sacrifice  
A time of blessed Paradise  
To minister to him.

Then, shepherd, knell and plead thy care :  
Saint Athelstan will help a man !  
What prayer a weeping shepherd can,  
The shepherd makes Saint Athelstan,  
And makes again his prayer.

O shepherd, look ! the cup of night  
Is broke, and clouds, dividing, yield  
To thee a sign, to thine a shield ;  
Look ! comes to earth a line of light,  
From Heaven it comes and waxes bright  
As Heaven itself concealed.

Now hasten whither thou art signed,  
And on a pitchy moorland find  
A wide and wild and pitchy wood  
As ever on a moorland stood  
With mountain lands behind.

Where pathless lost lands lie away  
Rise mountains gray and banded black  
With forests under mountains gray,  
And on gray mountains mountains stack  
And dwindle to a skiey rack  
For clouds there fixed as they.

And there's a stony slanting pit,  
And deep a mountain-side it mines,  
A crevice in a mountain split,  
And capped with fallen pines.

So deep above the cape is drawn  
No winds come there nor ever sun ;  
There dusk is ever one with dawn,  
And noon with midnight one.

Lone habitant the cavern hath,  
And lean at eve she stole away,  
And gray she picked her secret path  
As ever wolf was gray.

A chilly wolf it is she runs :  
An empty maw's a numbing bed.  
Over the mountain's cloudy head  
Climbed, seen or hid, three winter suns  
All since the gray wolf fed.



And on she comes in starving state  
To hunt the marsh where last she ate,  
And wander, whining, at a loss  
To rid her of the weary weight  
Behind the rib herself would freight ;  
To leave the marsh and hunt the moss,  
And howl her hunger overcross  
A land obliterate.

She's on a bank with willow hung . . .  
What news upon the night is sprung ?  
The gray wolf there, with eyes aslant  
And nostril slits agape, gives tongue  
And knells, not calls, her want.

What thing is hinted in the wind ?  
Some wasted hare or sodden bird  
Dies in the grass, or feeble hind  
Is fallen from the herd ?

Nay, none of these is rumoured there ;  
There is no knowledge in the wind  
Of dying bird or dying hare  
Or herd-forsaken hind.

But wandered feet have run the wild,  
And in the wood are eyes affright ;  
It is the shepherd's haunted child  
Is in the wood to-night.

'Twixt cloud and cloud a small sun shone  
And weakly ruled the winter day ;  
Was shepherd on his labours gone,  
The shepherd's boy from home alone  
Went, wonder-wist, astray.

The sun fell like a god rebuked,  
And east the lost boy turned, and west,  
And south and north the lost boy looked,  
And is the dark wood's guest.

As down the trees the shadow crept  
A night-bird through the shadow swept ;  
The lost boy heard her evil scream,  
And where he stood he sank and wept  
His way to icy dream.

And wakes to see—what sees he there,  
Or is his sense still led in dream ?  
What tricks with hope his chill despair  
Who heard the night-bird scream ?

As were there moon might fade her stream  
With beauty through wet woods and bare,  
Fades in his view a silver stair  
Lit by a fading beam ;

Lies in his view a fellow-guest  
Irradiant there with gentle light ;  
Was never mortal vision blest  
With lamb so holy white.

But, lost boy, listen—is it wind  
That rustles in the thorn behind?  
Nay, listen—look! O sight all dread!  
The lost boy stares and, horror-blind,  
Swoons down upon his bed.

Ay, shepherd crying, louder cry,  
And let thy anguish, rising, buy  
New grace for him whom Terror's wing  
Hath felled, lest he a midnight lie  
In madding trance, and wakening,  
Open an idiot eye.

O shepherd come into the wood,  
And call and hear and clasp again  
Whose eyes, if weeping, open sane—  
Whose eyes have looked on sainted blood  
And seen an angel slain.

Look in the sky, thou favoured man,  
And raise thy joy and higher raise  
What praise a weeping shepherd can!  
The shepherd makes Saint Athelstan—  
And makes again, his praise.

With holy ruin grass is red  
Where in a wood a gray wolf fed:  
The wolf is in her mountain pit,  
And night's a world to west of it,  
Day tops the mountain's head.



7  
The grass is red ; will rains remove  
The hallowed mark ; soon Spring will glove  
The wood anew, and none will tell  
The pity of that miracle ;  
It will be told where angels dwell,  
Its wonder and their love.

## THE SEDGE-WARBLER

I N early summer moonlight I have strayed  
Down pass and wildway of the wooded hill  
With wonder as again the sedge-bird made

His old, old ballad new beside the mill.  
And I have stolen closer to the song  
That, lispèd low, would swell and change to shrill,

Thick, chattered cheeps that seemed not to belong  
Of right to the frail elfin throat that threw  
Them on the stream, their waker. There among

The willows I have watched as over flew  
A noctule making zigzag round the lone,  
Dark elm whose shadow clipt grotesque the new

Green lawn below. On softest breezes blown  
From some far brake, the cruising fern-owl's cry  
Would stay my steps ; a beetle's nearing drone

Would steal upon my sense and pass and die.  
There I have heard in that still, solemn hour  
The quickened thorn from slaving weeds untie

A prisoned leaf or furlèd bloom, whose dower  
Of incense yet burned in the warm June night ;  
By darkness cozened from his grot to cower

And curve the night long, that shy eremite  
The lowly, banded eft would seek his prey ;  
And thousand worlds my silent world would light  
Till broke the babel of the summer day.

## THE MISSEL THRUSH

I SAW the sun burn in the blue,  
And a missel thrush flew by,  
And the missel thrush to a chestnut flew.

I saw a white cloud in the sky,  
And linnets sang—their breasts were red ;  
And linnets sang melodiously.

And up the sky the white cloud sped,  
The wind woke crying in the trees,  
And the white cloud battened, his bulk was fed

By a thousand clouds that swarmed like bees ;  
I heard the rough wind whistle shrill,  
And the clouds banked up in billowy seas.

O wild the day that was so still !  
The elm flung tribute of her green,  
And linnets tossed from hedge to hill.

The sun was gone and the wind blew keen,  
The clouds grew gray and grayer grew,  
The sun was gone behind the screen.

The wind blew wild and wilder blew,  
And shriller screamed and louder bawled,  
And spun with fury round the yew.

Like a bruised snake the yew branch crawled  
And cricked and hissed like a bruised snake  
Where the sheltering blackbird shrank appalled,

And waking slept and slept awake  
And huddled stupid from the day,  
Nor heard the clatt'ring thunder shake

The cloud that hung so low and gray ;  
I heard the thunder shake the cloud,  
And the rough wind come and die away.

I heard the gray thrush piping loud  
From the wheezing chestnut-tree ;  
The gray thrush gripped the spray that bowed



Beneath the storm, and brave sang he—  
O, he sang brave as he were one  
Who hailed a people newly free !

But all was fear and hope was none,  
For Heav'n bled flame as Heav'n were Hell ;  
Still the thrush sang blithely on.

The rough wind sank and the rough wind fell—  
O, the rough wind died upon the hill,  
And thunder was its passing-bell.

The gray cloud burst, I saw it spill  
Black floods as skiey seas fell whole.  
The thrush sang with amazing skill ;

The gray thrush heard the thunders roll,  
And sang and heard not what he sang.  
The Storm King claimed a noble toll,

I saw his golden fang,  
I saw it close upon the wood  
That loud with thrush notes rang.

I looked again : the tempest's hood  
Was torn across ; I saw the sky ;  
So green and new the chestnut stood,

The elm lay split hard by—  
From bough to bole the elm was split,  
And above was melody.

I saw the sky—the sky was lit,  
The sky was lit with sun.  
I saw a gray thrush by me flit ;

He sang no song—his song was done ;  
I saw his studded breast ;  
And plovers rose, ten score as one,  
And ribboned in the East.

## THE LAST BLACKBIRD

**M**Y head was tired ; I had no mind to think  
Of Beauty wronged and none to give redress :  
I got me to a place where linnets drink  
And lizards go in ferny loveliness.

A blackbird sang, so down I fell ; meseemed,  
Soothed by his note, I closed a drowsy lid ;  
And I was ventured on a dream—I dreamed  
One stood and questioned me how linnets did.

And straight I knew who thus in angel guise  
Would have my news—some trick of lip or brow  
Guessed me her rank ; I said not otherwise  
Than ill indeed it went with linnets now.

And with the words I got upon my feet ;  
Her look said she would hear if I had more :  
I led her to an ancient mossy seat,  
And blest the hour for my inquisitor.

“Nature,” I said, “O thou whose hand controlled  
And ordered chaos to a reasoned plan  
With ‘Know thou me, Old Night, and loose thy  
hold!’

And in whose accent Life and Love began :

“Whose ‘Keep thou this, and thou that circuit go,’  
Or ‘Here stand thou, and thou in that place  
stand,’

Lifted a meek or laid a hot star low,  
Chartered a sun or cancelled his command :

“Who flattered with an object aimless spheres,  
And gave to each place, precedence and class,  
Time and degree, till constancy was theirs,  
And perfect system where no system was :

“Hear me ! The blackbird piping from the hill,  
His insolent wild eye—its yellow rim—  
His coaly vest and yellow mandible—  
Is he not thine ? Wouldst thou continue him ?

“Art thou still minded, Nature, to provide  
The salts and sweets a frolic wagtail picks  
Out of the spume that quilts an idle tide  
Behind the trough where meeting waters mix ?

“Hast thou a mind to keep a redstart dressed  
As now and heretofore ; to order still  
Thy system of economy unguessed  
That gives a shiver to his flaring quill ?



“ Wouldst thou still keep the chiff-chaff to his song,  
And have him know to braid his grassy dome ?  
Wouldst knot and twist with many a weedy thong  
The green confusion leaping round his home ?

“ Is still thy mind for wrens and little springs  
And ferns and sudden stoats and popping mice,  
And all the myriad noisy rainbow wings  
That make the wood not less than Paradise ?

“ Wouldst in thy season strip the little wood  
And hap it over with a frozen coat,  
To spot a corner there with icy blood,  
And stretch a rabbit with a frozen stoat ?

“ Hear me,” I said. “ Thy wood’s a grandam’s  
tale ;  
Its trees are felled ; save one its birds are dead ;  
Thou art unqueened ; now other hands prevail ;  
One blackbird lives—he is the last,” I said.

And she, “ The poisèd moths thy hand caressed,  
Sip they not wines from fuchsias by the sea ?  
Runs clear no stream to bright a linnet’s breast  
Or sparkle in the moon ? Nay, gladden me !

“ Sure Beauty’s in the pine the heron crost,  
Or Beauty’s on the heath or down or plain,  
Or Beauty’s on the yellow desert lost  
In desert glare ? Nay, make me glad again.”

I said the place was changed where hawk-moths  
sipped

Eve's sugared cup ; nor now was Beauty's mark  
Upon the stream where once her linnets dipped,  
And moony bubbles raced into the dark ;

" Wild Beauty's left the down whereon she lay ;  
The heaths and plains are bare ; shy Beauty's  
fled

The woods ; fierce Beauty's left her desert day ;  
Beauty is fled or dead. Beauty is dead.

" Yon blackbird with to-night will end his race."

I stopped, and Nature rose and looked abroad :  
She came again and asked who ruled the place ;  
I named then him who reigned its overlord.

" Thou madest all things equal under thee ;  
To all thy gifts were Beauty, Love, and Youth."

" I pricked a vein that I might gladden me  
With flower of that my seed thou callest Truth."

" Thou chocest one not fairer than his kin  
To keep the story of thine eyes' delight."

" I gave a book to choice of mine wherein  
To chronicle that pleasing in my sight."

" Who learned the letters equal to his task  
To open ways beyond his right employ,  
Who got him to a fiction and a mask  
And hid the book he did not dare destroy !

“Not then he heard the noises in the cloud,  
Nor cried his wonder when the leaf uncurled  
After the wind, nor went he wonder-browed  
Adoring when the rainbow spanned the world.”

She said, “I gave him ears—” “He waxed them in.”  
“And sight : I taught him beauty was my sum.”  
“New gods he found : they taught him sight was sin.”  
“And speech and song.” “He blasphemed or was  
dumb.

“On every wind his evil fame was blown ;  
His every step struck fear and panic doubt ;  
Suspect and shunned, he armed and went alone,  
Or with sly wisdom walled himself about.

“He woodman turned and wide he laid his axe ;  
Stream, hill, and heath, to all he put his hand,  
Taxed pitilessly all ; all paid the tax ;  
Only the sea ignored his ill demand.

“He saw thy hills and brought a newer plan ;  
Hill, stream, and heath he tricked to evil whim ;  
Only the sea ignored or countered Man,  
Only the sea despised and countered him.

“And soon for sport a hunting he would go ;  
The chase is over save for yon last bird  
Whose wing to-morrow—” “Shout me this last  
woe !”—

I shrank beneath the angers I had stirred—



“ Whose wing to-morrow—shout ! This final  
prize—”

“ Will deck his stony mate for holiday.”  
Ten thousand hells roared out of Nature’s eyes,  
She pressed her lids and shut the rage away.

“ But knows he never midnight questioning ?  
Is every sense I gave him dead or dark ? ”  
I said, “ He knows he reigns to-day a king,  
And has forgot the day he was thy clerk.”

“ Henceforward is this world his gaud, his toy ;  
If bones he wills, in bones the world will lie ;  
His to deflower, infect, defile, destroy—  
Unless—” She said, “ Thou hast a remedy ? ”

I said, “ Save one, not I : reject, annul  
Him, seed and breed and story, or have done  
And send this world, thy Bubble Beautiful,  
With sudden moth-want whirling at its sun.”

She answered me, “ The last was spoken ill.  
My world is good ; its streams may yet run pure ;  
My blackbird now is piping from the hill ! ”  
She listened to his lazy overture.

Miraculous old song ! Our wonder met :  
She turned away and listened to the bird.  
“ To-night,” I said, “ to-night he’ll pay the debt.”  
“ To-night,” I said, but him alone she heard.

"Only the sea!" Then Nature, rising, stood :  
"The chase is over; yon last bird is free.  
Before I give new beauty to the wood,  
How say'st thou, poet, to a wider sea?"

She looked above : small as a pigeon's wing  
A cloud came up and crost the blackbird's tree.  
She said, "How say'st thou if yon blackbird bring,  
To wash my world, a deeper, wider sea?"

I woke. A dizzy man I reeling went  
Round by the hill : a blackbird hurried by ;  
Clouds raced and cracked ; to some high argument  
Were hurrying the gossips of the sky.

## THE DOWN BY MOONLIGHT

THE down looks new whose lonely slopes I climb,  
Yet is he old despite the dress he wears :  
Old as the dark and concreate with Time,

Waste with the affliction of uncounted years.  
A weary head he stretches to the pale  
Of Heaven ; one bended arm of him uprears

A shaggy fist, as if to turn the hail  
And fire of tempest fraught with new distress  
For his old brow ; and one arm seems to trail

Its atrophied and bony nakedness  
Down to the streams that bless the living land,  
As if, to mitigate the loneliness,

He too would reach, as we, another's hand.  
So quiet this hour is grown, a whisper's fall  
Were sacrilege ; within me as I stand

Shy wonder, waking, seems a common brawl,  
And even thought itself is over loud ;  
Desire alone is dumb ; no plover's call ;

And if owls fly, their flight is unavowed  
For cry I hear of theirs : peace here and far,  
And save the moon's loved presence one lit cloud  
Is sole 'twixt me and night's first listening star.

## HOLIDAY

I WOKE to hear the song that early rang  
My boyhood on from Spring to fairer Spring,  
The song of wonder, new as when I sprang

To its first note with boyish welcoming.  
O may its glory fail not from my sense  
Till Life—the Toll-bridge crost—unquestioning,

With Love alone, in last obedience,  
Turns to the Dark ; nay, even in that hour  
When clay shall merge in final consequence

With clay, whose sod—moist cradle of some flower,  
Young heart's-ease blue or blest anemone—  
Leaps to the sun, I would remained yet power

In my cold ear to stir the heart of me  
To heed if echoed faint such anthem there  
As poured at waking from my window tree.  
I rose and fed my soul on that sweet fare.

I rose and listened to the wildest lay  
Brown song-thrush ever made to song-thrush brown.  
The wild song ended and I looked away

And saw the angel Sunshine on the down ;  
I saw her largen yellow on the green  
Wide fields ; I saw her slowly sweep and crown

The proudest elm the sun hath ever seen ;  
I saw her search along the hedge and find  
The bluest violet ever sent to lean

A shy face from a too attentive wind ;  
Deep in the gloried elm the angel found  
The mildest dove that for a mild dove pined ;

To her embrace I saw a skylark bound,  
The loudest lark that ever dared the sun  
Or, tranced with bliss, swooned from his own sweet  
sound.



Where would my angel there a way she won  
With melody for half a world and me.  
Was never day for holiday begun  
Like that a thrush hailed from my window tree.

## THE LINNET

THEY say the world's a sham, and life a lease  
Of nightmare nothing nicknamed Time, and  
we

Ghost voyagers in undiscovered seas  
Where fact is feign ; mirage, reality :

Where all is vain and vanity is all,  
And eyes look out and only know they stare  
At conjured coasts whose beacons rise and fall  
And vanish with the hopes that feigned them  
there :

Where sea-shell measures urge a phantom dance  
Till fancied pleasure drowns imagined pain—  
Till Death stares madness out of countenance,  
And vanity is all and all is vain.

It may be even as my friends allege.  
I'm pressed to prove that life is something more—  
And yet a linnet on a hawthorn hedge  
Still wants explaining and accounting for.

## THE WINDS

GREAT scutcheoned moths with velvet hoods,  
And moths whose wings bore no device,  
Blundered out of dusky woods,

Constrained by some rare avarice  
Or deeper sense not guessed by me,  
To seek in flame their Paradise.

Bleaching fern and waning tree—  
Tired of these the willow-wren  
Sang and slipped off oversea.

No medalled thrush for music then !  
And the blackbird cock made melody  
No more than his brindled hen.

Hour in, hour out, the dragon-fly  
Raced his image in a ditch  
Blue with cloudless undersky ;

Or it was Night, then Night was rich  
In eyes her own whose downward glance  
Found every pool a glass in which

No cloud impaired her countenance,  
When Autumn, a reluctant heir,  
Came into his inheritance.

And long Night found no cloud impair  
Her beauty where, in sun arrayed,  
The dragon-fly still came to share

Blue waters with his burnished shade.  
But the woodlands sickened surely ; now  
Never tree but Autumn laid

Infecting fingers on its brow.  
Pink with disease and fungus-dun,  
A few leaves fell from a sunlit bough. . . .

I watched them falling, one by one—  
The self-same leaves that opened new  
Without a spot to self-same sun.

There came a time when Night wore through  
And saw no moon in pool or stream ;  
Her steps were traced by dawn that grew

To day beneath a hindered beam ;  
And the sleepest elm of a sleepy row  
Pawed the wind that crost her dream ;

And the woods around, aloft and low,  
Fell troubled with many a wind ;  
Then half the winds came up to blow

With half the winds behind,  
And a redbreast sang on a barley-mow  
A dirge to a sun gone blind.

O now the rout of leaf and bow !  
And O for memories of Spring !  
To every leaf far-flying now

Some memory did cling—  
The wood-wren dropt on a nearer spray,  
His song and his shaking wing—

The thrush—the egg on scarce dry clay—  
The thrush that woke before the dawn,  
To first discover day,

And the song that came when blinds were drawn,  
And the quiet owl-time mapped for me  
Upon a moon-washed lawn,

Under a wide-armed tree,  
Faery Asias newly sprung  
From a green, enchanted sea—

O seemed with every dead leaf wrung  
From every branch once green,  
And on the tide of refuse flung,

There went a leaf unseen,  
From spoiling boughs of memory  
Some grace of what had been.

Now far beneath a billow sky  
The rape of woods was borne :  
No hedge but there went piracy,



No thief but stripped some thorn ;  
And the bough that gave not with the blast  
The closer bough was shorn.

No tree in the pelt of wind and waste,  
Sheer to the dint of all,  
But seemed of weariness at last

Herself half green must fall,  
With twice a hundred thieves to sack  
Her ruined coronal.

'Twixt elms across the tempest's track  
Tossed one more vast than they ;  
Her story told a woodland wrack

Spread far as woodland day ;  
From the measure of wealth her branches bore  
No wind that blew but took its prey.

And winds were here in many a score,  
Scraping, screwing, gnawing some,  
Like rats on a granary floor ;

And winds to crawl and clasp were come—  
Winds sprung from a serpent seed ;  
And winds to rive and throttle from

Starved packs of a wolfish breed ;  
And many a wind could fancy find  
Fetch'd out of hills at eagle speed

To stun and bruise and thrash and grind,  
To clout and tug and clip and tease ;  
And they roared and drummed and blared and  
whined

And bleated and whistled in fifty keys,  
And sighed and howled and sang and mewed,  
Winds of divers and all degrees,

A preying maniacal multitude,  
Avid as they whose furies hew  
A ship into sticks of kindling-wood

A morrow's gentler tides shall strew  
Round tearful isles and isthmuses  
With an eyeless, bony crew.

Anon, anon, nor end nor ease !  
I let Imagination feign  
Great beating hearts in wooden trees,

Gave wits and sense to knot and grain,  
And saw a heart-broke elm go mad  
Betwixt a bedlam twain.

Their leaves a whirling myriad,  
Forth Autumn's windy lip,  
Fled up a weedy field that had

No tree her tooth might strip ;  
Some fell and some made haste anew  
As slaves that heard the whip ;

Then many fell ; a far-borne few  
Lost now and later seen,  
Tossed high above a hedge into

A tree nor red nor green,  
And they trickled through her skeleton  
Like ashes through a screen.

So Night without a moon came on  
A land of sunless day,  
Enriching still with carrion

The manors of decay  
Must woods and valleys never fair  
That skirt the Year's highway.

Dread mists and mildew flourish there,  
And tumour-blooms endow  
With poisoned sweets the cold, dead air.

Naught of beauty with me now  
But, like dead leaves left behind  
Staring from a frosty bough,  
Would be off with any wind.

## MY BOOKS

WHEN the folks have gone to bed,  
And the lamp is burning low,  
And the fire burns not so red  
As it burned an hour ago,

Then I turn about my chair  
So that I can dimly see  
Into the dark corner where  
Lies my modest library.

Volumes gay and volumes grave,  
Many volumes have I got ;  
Many volumes though I have,  
Many volumes have I not.

I have not the rare Lucasta,  
London, 1649 :  
I'm a lean-pursed poetaster,  
Or the book had long been mine.

I have not an early Herrick ;  
I have wanted Dowland too,  
Since that lover of a lyric,  
Symonds, wrote "The Key of Blue."

Never has my luck been lashed  
To the Mariner of York,  
And in First edition washed  
To my bookshelf : egg of auk



Never was so rare as this  
Volume that earned Dan Defoe  
Deathless literary bliss.  
I have not Ned Ward, nor know

That the rhyming knave I want  
Who did such a merry ill  
To Don Quixote ; D'Avenant,  
Too, I lack, and Aaron Hill.

Books of travel ; books of sport ;  
Books of no or some or great  
Theological import ;  
Books about affairs of State,

Absent are with many others ;  
I can't boast an early Donne,  
Nor the "Poems by Two Brothers,"  
Though I have a Tennyson.

But enough of treasures lacking !  
If my cloak is frayed and torn,  
I will send King Covet packing,  
And present the cloak as worn.

Are my senses gone asleep ?  
Sure I hear John Suckling laugh  
From his grave in ancient sheep,  
As, hard by, in mottled calf,

London, 1651,

Lab'ring Carew once more sighs  
Through a score of sonnets on  
Mistress Celia's long-closed eyes.

Comes a rather female song,  
Sweet and sad ; 'tis Tommy Moore  
Singing of Ierne's wrong  
Just as Tommy sang of yore.

Near him Rogers bitterly  
Wails this oddest freak of Fate's—  
Folks, he hears, buy "Italy"  
Only for the charming plates.

Near the "Wit's Interpreter"  
(Like an antique Whitaker,  
Full of strange etcetera),  
"Areopagitica,"

And the muse of Lycidas,  
Lost in meditation deep,  
Give the cut to Hudibras,  
Unaware the knave's asleep.

There the tinker's won'drous son  
(Lately come into his own)  
Urges still the Pilgrim on,  
Shouts again for Mansoul Town.

Written by a friend of Keats,  
That torn fragment next the Clare  
Lightly of "The Fancy" treats.  
Next to Masson's Essays, there,

In three volumes Bagehot lies :  
Wiser pen among the witty,  
Wittier among the wise,  
Never wrote about the City.

On the broad back of his race  
Swift, there, cuts with savage art  
Half a fiend's, half ass's face ;  
Will time ever soothe the smart ?

There lies Coleridge, bound in green,  
Sleepily still wondering what  
He meant Kubla Khan to mean.  
In that early Wordsworth, Mat

Arnold knows a faithful prop,—  
Still to subject-matter leans,  
Murmurs of the loved hill-top,  
Fyfield tree and Cumnor scenes.

Ayrshire's Peasant-Poet-King  
Sang his soul into that page,  
Stopped—a lark shot on the wing—  
Just as his muse came of age.

There is Byron, nowadays  
Held in small repute by some.  
He must do without their praise.  
And there's Shake—and THERE I'm dumb.

Fauna of my crowded shelves,  
Birds of an unequal quill,  
There they roost like labelled elves,  
Waiting mine or Fate's last will.

On a day outside my ken,  
Soon maybe or haply late,  
These will pass to other men ;  
*One* will know a rarer fate.

Book of cloud and wind and sea,  
More than all the others mine,  
Ere the Roll is called for me  
Knowest what end will be thine ?

I will have thee to the fire ;  
So thy Parent went his way,  
After ocean stilled his lyre,  
From the sands of Spezzia.

## IN FANCY FAIR

FANCY at her garden gate :  
Fancy may have long to wait.  
Pole to Line and sun to snow :  
Fancy may have far to go.



Memory hath dreams : the birds,  
Prisoned sobs and passioned words.  
In the waking sun they stand,  
Life's drab riddle in his hand.

Thrushes, O be silent now . . .  
Now with song record his vow.  
Shrink not daisies, as they kneel.  
Part they now for woe or weal.

Hope is hers and hers long prayer,  
His a loop of her dark hair :  
Hope is hers, he'll win the world :  
Fancy's sails are wide unfurled.

He will come again at noon,  
His bright way with roses strewn.  
From the turnpike wave good-bye,  
From the hill-top—hope is high !

Wave her wait and wave him well . . .  
Memory no more may tell.  
Hope is high : O then beware !  
Gauds are cheap in Fancy Fair.

Now a gray dream fancy weaves :  
Roses change to cypress leaves.  
He lies bleeding, dying, far  
In the cloud and wrack of war ;

Or in hunger walks and want,  
Hope a spent illuminant.  
He has sunk (God !), sold to shame  
A dishonoured, ancient name ;

Or, though victor in the race,  
Is forsworn : some fairer face  
Lures his soul to Lethe leech.  
Mark ye how that grisly wretch,

Wrinkled Doubt, the malice-eyed,  
Mad his midnight mare doth ride . . .  
Fear and lies and old despair  
Haunt the lanes of Fancy Fair.

Face them, Fancy, show thy whip !  
Pariahs ! each lifted lip—  
Each red coward mouth will flee  
To the kennels. Comfort thee.

Take new roses for thy breast :  
He will dream and come to rest.  
In the shadows he will come ;  
Do thou fend with faith his home.

Slow the deep tear upward wells,  
Fancy changing sentinels—  
Fancy at her garden gate :  
Fancy may have long to wait.

## THROWN

I'M down, good Fate, you've won the race ;  
Bite deep and break a tooth in me ;  
Now spit your poison in my face,  
And let me be ;  
Leave me an hour and come again  
With insults new and further pain.

For of your tooth I'll make a pen,  
And of your slaver ink, and will  
I bring a joy to being then  
To race you still :  
A laughing child with feathered heels  
Who shall outspeed your chariot wheels.

## THE HAMMERS

NOISE of hammers once I heard,  
Many hammers, busy hammers,  
Beating, shaping, night and day,  
Shaping, beating dust and clay  
To a palace ; saw it reared ;  
Saw the hammers laid away.

And I listened, and I heard  
Hammers beating, night and day,  
In the palace newly reared,  
Beating it to dust and clay :  
Other hammers, muffled hammers,  
Silent hammers of decay.

## BEAUTY SPRITE

**F**ALSE lights and shifting sand—  
Black way and rough and long—  
Lost men and like to fail—  
This much is ours :

Sometimes to strike a trail,  
Sometimes to hear a song,  
Sometimes to seize a hand,  
I even yours.

Go with me till the sun  
Mine be and yours,  
Star and companion,  
Ours, even ours.



## THE ROSE

**H**OW praise the rose ! Let praise go by :  
Let us not praise where praising were  
To underpraise ; we may come nigh,  
Withholding praise, to praising her.

## QUARTER-DAY

**D**EATH asked : the debtor bit his lip  
And offered something on account ;  
Death smiled and took a closer grip :  
The debtor paid the full amount.

## THE NIGHT

**F**OND muse surrender, weary as thou art,  
To sleep at last ; a meadow's breadth from  
thee,  
In yon dim copse and still, a sister heart  
Hath respite from its old sweet agony.

The wall of night is up ; around, across,  
Above nor sound nor sense of day remains ;  
Comes only now the fitful drive and toss  
Of moths upon the yellow window-panes.

## AN ERRING MUSE

OUT ! Wretched Rhyme, and none of my be-  
getting !

Quit ! Go thy ways ; I say I'll none of thee !  
Fie on thee, Muse, that thou shouldst go coquet-  
ting

With every losel that would sport with me.

Now am I one whom Fate hath countered slyly ;  
In me behold a bard dispirited—

Joined with a muse whom Mischance, jesting  
dryly,

To spite my fame hath sued and brought to bed.

Where wert thou, Metre, when the churl espied  
her,

And planned to mar the lustre of my song ?  
Wherefore was thy protection then denied her,  
To her undoing and my lyric wrong ?

Go to ! I will to Prose and win his favour.

Too soon my lyric wine is at the lee ;  
Too soon my lyric salt hath lost its savour ;  
I will to Prose and pray him succour me.

Nay, go ! I'm stone : I say I'll not resume her.

Her mention adds new venom to my smart !  
Ay, get her hence ! let pies and crows unplume  
her,  
And blank annihilation end her part !

One moment still, let me upbraid her roundly !

Was never bard so villainously vexed  
And put about by trollop muse, but soundly  
I will repay who hath me thus perplexed.

Thou cart-tail queen ! Go, blandish with thine  
ogles

The bloodless breast of midnight's baleful king ;  
From his embrace let riving imps and bogles,  
Ghast moonlight jinn, and morrow-madness  
spring.

Lost dam of Mischief ! Dost thou hope to melt  
me

With tears less salt than those whose scalding  
brine  
Clings round the thrust thy evil gaming dealt me,  
To smart its depth while mortal years are mine ?

She weeps, she only weeps, nor heeds nor hears me.  
At every turn I face ill fortune's prong,  
Yet know not whether most her weeping tears me,  
Or I am torn with anger at my wrong.

Ay me ! I would not mete her fault too shrewdly,  
Nor nag her to an ecstasy of shame ;  
Whom once I loved I would not drive too rudely  
To wail in exile her lost lyric name.

Nay, how shall I, least worthy son of Adam,  
Glad heir to half the sins he left entail,  
Deliver judgment on this erring madam,  
Compel her to a convent and the veil ?

Now 'shrew me that would send a woman weeping,  
What was the work this pother's all about ?  
It seems some mischance found my metre sleeping,  
Whose place it was to keep such rascals out.

Well then ? Well then, what doth the scurvy varlet  
But whisk my lady off without a word.  
And she ? And she, she says, went crimson scarlet  
And screamed like anything, but no one heard.

And then ? And then, of course, the raff besought  
her  
With "pretty" this and "pretty" that—in brief,  
To such a pass this woundy mischief brought her,  
That she hath borne a brat beyond belief.



Well there, maybe I've split a straw too finely,  
Too bitter mixed an erring muse's cup ;  
I must look on such matters more benignly. . . .  
Ay, I'll entreat a kiss and make it up.

Two eyes of tears ! What, human, can withstand  
'em,  
Ten thousand angers trumpeting their force ?  
Two eyes of tears will presently disband 'em,  
And list 'em into armies of remorse.

Then come, sweet Muse, no longer nurse thy sorrow ;  
I'll father this and any rhyme of thine ;  
Forget as I forgive, and I to-morrow  
Will advertise the world the babe is mine.

## AN ELEGY UPON A POEM RUINED BY A CLUMSY METRE

**G**AZE on thy deed, damned Metre, and be dumb !  
Lies dead the Joy that sought in thy embrace  
A hostelry, and found, alas ! a tomb :  
Look, and with penitential tears efface

From memory the scarlet of thy sin.  
Yet ere erasure sun thy soul again,  
Brook my brief lamentation ; let me win  
For that last effluence of my fevered brain,

A niche in Fame's high temple. . . . Jewel rare  
As ever yet from that dim pit and deep,  
Man's mind, was dug : sweet flower and frail as  
fair,

Too early wakened from a wintry sleep—

For thee I mourn and pitch a peevish key !  
Spring from thy wat'ry pillow, Truth, and hear ;  
Come sisters twain, thou clear-eyed Sanity  
And stern-browed Sense, come lend a patient ear.

Oft with Imagination I have bored  
And tunnelled like a mole the sacred soil  
Of Poesy ; and with her I have soared  
Above the clouds to spy among and spoil

The furthest fields of Heaven ; at her command  
I've walked below the sea and cut my way  
Through mucous wrecks that strew the stretchèd  
sand

'Twixt western Ind and impotent Cathay ;

And in her sight, beneath an English sky,  
I've shared his dreams who on the Asian plain  
Left crook and shears and rode to empery,  
And half a world bowed under Tamerlane.

Old Druids on the downs have watched with me  
For revelation from a silent star,  
And I, as even they, have bent a knee  
To Caturix, and sung with them to war.

I've read the books : stained record of Man hurled  
Against himself ; thus taught each ruined page—  
From birth to adolescence spun the world  
Through tides of woe, and will to wrinkled age.

Save that drear lore small profit there was mine ;  
Yet this : who breaks the idols of Man's past,  
To build anew for men a later shrine,  
But builds to be his own iconoclast.

Ev'n in the dim recess of my own mind  
I've dared to look ; held inquisition there,  
Strange riddles solved and mysteries divined,  
Nigh laid the secret of my being bare ;

Seen Impulse in the seed whose sudden flower  
Too often blows to hide a barbèd stem ;  
Seen Pleasure, surfeit with her own sweet dower,  
Fade to a spectre with a diadem.

There in the seventh cellar of my soul  
I've crushed the stone where Malice tipped her  
spears ;  
And raked the dust of Anger's burnt-out coal,  
And watched with awe the genesis of tears.

And this fair thing I've seen : Hope, lightning  
bright,  
But not inconstant like the sword of Heaven,  
And smiling still in her own dear despite  
When Desperation through my soul has driven.

But not for me Imagination throve  
From song-born seed new ecstasy so wild,  
Nor woke lost captain's battle shouts and wove  
Wild dream so new as wert thou, her dead Child.

Nor ever to Imagination's wand  
Came aught so rare from land or sky or sea,  
Nor aught so shy or bright or strange I scanned  
When Introspection bared my depths to me ;

Nor in the stained books I found displayed,  
Though angels wept there, tear so pure ; nor I,  
From wrecked beliefs whose altars long withstayed  
Truth's certain tide, beheld, that might not die,

One pale flame kindle beautiful as wert  
Thou, unblown Flower and fadeless : lo ! beneath  
These lilac boughs, in warm grass pansy girt,  
I hide thy urn and leave this rhymèd wreath.

## THE VANITY OF HUMAN AMBITION AND BIG BEHAVIOUR

**O** NOW all ye whom Arrogance brought low,  
Whom Folly or Illusion's Judas-kiss  
Entangled in a labyrinth of woe—  
Children of Dream and heirs of Nemesis—



Awake, arise, and let your deeds be told ;  
Come forth and in Dissuasion's service win  
The little note denied your deeds of old :  
Fame's door is wide, ye need but enter in.

Behold as thick as gnats at evenglow  
They come a jaunty herohood, agog  
To turn this work—if I may put it so—  
Into a lyric Dic. of Nat. Biog.

A pushing fellow, seeking note and fame,  
Went out to break a lance with Xiphias ;  
Archbishop Willson says our hero's name  
Was Coe. The learned prelate, if he, as

One likes to think, spoke not without the book  
Before he disallowed such names as Lee,  
Burdette and Gray, and Parkinson and Hook,  
And Mackintosh and Dixon and McGee,<sup>1</sup>

As having claims too shadowy and thin  
For cold consideration in the case,  
Might anyway have said where Coe's came in :  
Occasion finds odd logic in his Grace.<sup>2</sup>

But Parkinson, Coe, Dixon, or Burdette,  
Lee, Mackintosh, or Hook, McGee or Gray,  
He died B.C., to Pompeii's regret ;  
The good Archbishop, too, has passed away.

<sup>1</sup> "Life and Letters," edited by Llewellyn Lane. Also see "Side-saddle and Steamboat in South Europe," by Lady Grahame-Price.

<sup>2</sup> As witness his peculiar views on the Ruyan Monarchy, "Life and Letters," chap. xxiii.

The tale, then, it is mine to tell will show  
To what unseemly shift a bard is pressed,  
Who, doubting not the evidence for Coe,  
Would neither in discredit hold the rest.

Did Mackintosh know fear? The slender bill  
Wherewith he armed to turn the other's blade,  
And swift thereafter pink him in the gill,  
Was tough and keen. Burdette was not afraid.

Hook eyed the fish. The argent orb of night  
With tender longing wan looked on the sea,  
And flung a wreath of kisses to the white  
Young wanton waves. The monster eyed McGee.

Gray stood his ground. The supersensuous air  
Toyed sadly with the shimmering strands of spray  
That, like a languid naiad's tangled hair,  
Shone opalescent. Lee now looked away.

For Parkinson was bored. The lucent wave  
With rhythmic lassitude fell to and fro  
O'er many a spongy lawn and haunted cave  
Of dim crustacea. Dixon turned to go.

Then time was called; above Night's widening  
plume  
With numerous glimmering stars was gemmed  
about,  
Whose pale effulgence fell to re-illumine  
The sun-lorn waste, and Coe was counted out.

Not with the noise and blare of sounded brass  
And common hum that marks a prince returned,  
But like the gent who comes about the gas,  
Unasked, unblest, unknissed, and unconcerned,

Truth comes to Man (who rarely questions whence  
Or why, if come she must, she comes so late)  
And takes the sum of his incompetence,  
And drops a tract and leaves him to his fate.

One sore chagrined with envy of the Cid,  
Came out of Crim by way of the Levant,  
And sailed to Spain and settled in Madrid,  
And looked about and wagered a byzant

That he would snare, disarm, and bring to land  
The stoutest cuttle in the Spanish Main,  
And jumped off Gib. and snared a cuttle, and  
Came never more upon the coast of Spain.

Not Policy, slow tracing like a worm,  
Circuitous and dim through sunless ways,  
To crown a painful, calculated term  
With high achievement and a people's praise,

But Impulse, blind, inconsequent, and vain,  
Called on the joyless mameluke, Githar—  
Whom John of Teflis lost to Smandercane  
When last he met the Usbec prince in war—

To pelt his uncle Selim with the soap  
What time the elder took his morning tub.  
Did Uncle Selim wanly smile and hope  
That time would yet teach manners to the  
cub ?

Or did he rise as, reader, thou hadst done,  
And as in honour he was bound to do,  
And talk it over with his sister's son ?  
These knew and wept the course he took, these  
knew :

Melodious bulbuls in the almond trees,  
The flaming carp that lit the palace pond,  
The doe-led fawns in forest fastnesses  
That twisted many a tangled mile beyond ;

And on the windy hills the antelopes,  
And gibbering bats in scented lemon groves,  
And eagles screaming at the mountain tops,  
And in the gloomy cedars cushat doves ;

And in the hot blue sky the wand'ring crane,  
And in the hot blue sky the circling kite,  
And on the hot, eye-baffling desert plain,  
Dry, gliding things of fell or futile spite ;

And in the folded leaf the folded worm,  
And dreaming in the bark the chrysalis,  
And in the soaring, wind-borne seed the germ  
Of jungles yet to know their genesis ;



And at the lonely well mid Ira's heat,  
In tent or dhow or bagnio or bazar,  
At silent tomb or in the swarming street,  
From Trebizonde and Kars to Bussarah,

From Antioch to Tartar Samarkand,  
Boor, bassa, bedouin, infidel, and Turk :  
These knew and wept Githar's mad folly, and  
These knew what supervened upon his work.

No tyrant drunk with pride and armed with  
power,  
His throne a shambles and his music war,  
No hero hot and ripened to the hour,  
And for its quick salvation singular,

Was Jil the Giaur, a lad of Ascalon,  
Whose humour crost the toothèd thing of  
Nile :

His tibia turned up, and long time won  
From women tears, from men a mirthless smile

At Susa by the Midland Sea, one Tegg,  
A potboy and reputed for a quiz,  
No reptiles handy, pulled the pieman's leg ;  
The boy, however, got away with his.

The Bagdad Pipe-rolls tell how one, a beau,  
Kicked McHaroun, the barber, for a joke,  
How caution ruled the canny figaro,  
And what Mac done to pay the fancy bloke.

Now from the gloom that wraps two nameless stones,  
The shades of . . . and . . . invite my pen  
To trace their faulty day, and from their bones  
Pick wisdom in the name of living men.

Their earthly habitat was Bagdad town,  
And, as coevals of the barber Mac,  
Were subjects of that prince who owed his crown  
To brother Achmet sleeping on his back.

With soundy argument at dawn they met,  
And saw the sun go down the Occident  
(Ay me ! where late another sun had set  
For Avon stream) with soundy argument.

They bragged in terms of angle, hound, and lure,  
Of family, of friend, of dice and ball,  
Of virtue, vice, and love, and literature,  
And grew, by easy stages, personal.

"Thou cringing turnspit ! with thy kin debate !  
Peace, ere some mastiff tire of thee and thrust,  
With too much honour for thy mean estate,  
A peevish paw and merge thee with the dust !"

"Nay, upstart bantam, strut with them thy size ;  
Crow back thy kidneys' with an equal note ;  
Contend with such as, beating thee, would prize  
The lowly glory of thy silenced throat !"

“ Be dumb, glib pyot, lest thy noise offend  
The eyried falcon’s sense till, wearied, he  
Incline his wing thy way and condescend  
To stoop and strike and, striking, cancel thee ! ”

They scowled, lip weary ; stars came over new ;  
The stars looked on them and a moonbeam fell ;  
The moonbeam lit them as they went unto  
An antique chamber looking on the Mall.

And there for aye they laid their tongues to rest,  
And took them staves and locked the attic door,  
And drew the window-blind, and never guessed  
The frail condition of the attic floor.

So stood these lads to arms, all unaware  
What fiends and angels pitied them or mocked,  
What fiends and angels trod the attic stair,  
And entered by the door on mortals locked.

Thus, masking in the winter face of Truth,  
Came Disillusion, dreary ghost, and sped  
A fletchèd arrow barbed with Reason’s tooth—  
That instant Hope fell bleeding and lay dead.

Came Hate, sure signet still of serpent power  
In human hearts, and with obscene excess  
Joyed in the clasp of Scorn ; the pride and flower  
And pink of devildom came there to press

Their sovereign's loathly suit with added spite  
For that dread Hour ere yet the first slow beat  
Of young Time's pulse responded to the flight  
Of years ; came thither, too, on wandering feet

Whom men name Chance, nor seemed he well to  
know

What brought him to that place, what faithful star  
Or faithless urged his stay, yet did he throw  
Among his peers assembled wide and far—

If I may use the term when all were met  
Beneath a ceiling twelve feet by fifteen—  
No little consternation, so he set  
A good example, and no more was seen.

Now Expectation waited in the air,  
And ten-tongued Rumour from her leash ran  
free—

A mouthy brach ; came from her fetid lair  
The bat-eyed harridan old Prophecy,

Her ashen locks wild strewn about her brow ;  
And License came, sweet Liberty's rude twin ;  
Mute over all hung heedless Fate, and now  
The palsied despot Crisis shuffled in.

Here leave the lads : I would not were detailed  
Their story further ; only would I tell  
That midnight's gilt elaboration paled  
Above a silent attic on the Mall. . . :



The Caliph Ali went to Ispahan  
And backed a mule there in a steeplechase ;  
His fancy won, and then the bookie ran ;  
The punter lost a pony on the race.

Likewise the Cypriot El Ezra, he  
Who took a tester to a ducatoon  
About the colt by Nix-Mnemosyne  
To win the Sherbet Stakes at Scandaroon,

What fun was his ? Who so will stake his lot,  
Impelled thereto by nescience or whim,  
Cupidity or innocence or not,  
On Chance's colours, let men pray for him.

Yet may he sit serene and well content,  
When others nose the future for his hurt,  
Who, beautiful and wise and prescient,  
Shall gamble all he hath upon a cert.

Ah, little thought King Cheops long ago—  
Yet wherefore, to what end, why deeper drink  
At brackish wells and fountains of old woe !  
What matters now what Cheops didn't think !

What matters now what siren song beguiled  
The steps of Mna, most loved of Andæ's sons,  
Or that in Coac's sun-charred desert wild  
He wrote repentance with his whited bones !

Nay, cease ; Dissuasion cannot surely ask  
A shrewder schedule of Oblivion's gains ;  
O cease ! my muse is weary of her task,  
And would on other themes expend her pains.

## DULCINA, A BULL-TERRIER

DULCINA was, then suns rebelled  
And trod th' eternal word ;  
To every ball its limits held,  
The universe was stirred.

World embryos, in chaos rolled,  
Knew system at her cry,  
And hoary planets ages cold  
Policed anew the sky.

Suns came and sun's star's satellites  
To sing Dulcina's power,  
And myriad moons left myriad nights  
To keep a pagan hour.

In rebel red extravagance  
The flaming legions came ;  
In her transplendent brilliance  
They paled to candle flame,

And praised above all dams her dam,  
And gave her sire reward,  
And hailed me blest o'er all who am  
Her bondsman and her bard ;

Who sees in her all things glassed fair,  
And Paradise would fly,  
That wanting her were angel bare  
And drear felicity.

## THE GREAT AUK'S GHOST

THE Great Auk's ghost rose on one leg,  
Sighed thrice and three times winkt,  
And turned and poached a phantom egg,  
And muttered, " I'm extinct."

## THE FINAL DODO

THE final Dodo gathered wool  
Upon a mountain side ;  
His energy was wonderful,  
And finally he died.

## FAREWELL

GO, little book ; fear not thy fate ;  
Though men deride and rail  
And pass thee by, yet Truth is great,  
By Jove ! and will prevail.

## TO MY MUSE

OMELIC Muse, whose constant love  
Sustained my timorous reed ;  
Darned threadbare Fancy's vest, or wove  
New garments to her need ;

Cheered Metre when his heart was down,  
Or gently plied the spur,  
And brought us all to Finis Town  
To seek a Publisher :

Go not ! Brave heart, and gay as true,  
Till Time ebb out stay by  
To teach my straw, then let us two  
Pipe down Eternity.

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The last blackbird

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